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SUBJECT: ASSEMBLY ELECTS NEW SUPREME COURT

REF: SAN SALVADOR 623

¶1. Summary: The Legislative Assembly unanimously elected five Supreme Court justices July 16. The Assembly failed to elect a new Attorney General or a new Public Defender; those elections are expected to be postponed until August. End Summary.

¶2. On July 16, the Legislative Assembly unanimously elected five justices to the Supreme Court ending a two-week impasse that had left the courts gridlocked (reftel). Belarmino Jaime, an attorney from the banking sector, was elected Chief Justice. Florentin Melendez, Edward Sidney Blanco, Rodolfo Gonzalez, and Maria Luz Regalado were also elected to the Supreme Court.

¶3. The Assembly failed to reach a consensus on a new Attorney General or a new Public Defender. As a result, the Assembly decided to re-open the candidate list (accept new candidates) for the Attorney General position and postponed the elections until August. Astor Escalante will continue as the Acting Attorney General until a new Attorney General is elected.

¶4. Comment: The Assembly's inability to select Supreme Court justices by the June 30 deadline left the country with one of the three branches of government temporarily out of business. It was not lost on legislators that El Salvador could ill afford a prolonged institutional crisis while neighboring Honduras was institutionally melting down. We will meet the new Chief Justice soon and raise pending extradition cases.
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